

ROLE OF DRAMA IN EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Abstract :

Impairment in social skills is one of the three limitation among persons with Autism spectrum disorder. Lack of social skill is causing hindrance in mainstreaming ASD children in to inclusive classroom. Over the years many research are conducted to address the social issues of children with ASD one among them is Drama therapy. The purpose of the study was to find whether Drama as performing art can help children with Autism to overcome social skill limitation and get ready for inclusive school. The study has conducted on 10 children with ASD between a age of 6 to 9 years at a NGO. A self made tool has been used to assess children with ASD. A comprehensive group activities programme has been planned. a thirty day intervention has been given. The qualitative and quantitative analysis showed that drama has effect on enhancing social skills among children with ASD.

Keywords: *Drama Therapy, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Social Skills, School readiness.*

1. Introduction

Autism is a psycho somatic disorder - a condition that affects mental and physical well being. In fact autism is not a single disorder rather a group of ailments that is classified as autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Autistic children have problems with social interactions. They may also encounter problems with verbal and non-verbal communication, exhibit pattern of repetitive behavior with narrow, restricted interests, hyper sensitive to light, sound, touch etc (sensory overload). The research indicates that the incidence of autism is more among boys than girls. Depending on the severity, ASD is diagnosed early in infancy. Otherwise majority of the cases are diagnosed anywhere between the age of 2-5 years. Interestingly, there are many individuals who may have ASD but never aware of it. Though the exact cause for autism is unknown, genetics plays an important part.

2. Definition

According to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1994, autism refers to a disorder in which a person manifests the following characteristics: social interaction impairment, communication problems and repetitive, stereotypic, and restricted interests and activities. Autism is often referred as a syndrome because it consists of a composite of different characteristics, which occur, in conjunction with each other.

"Autism Spectrum Disorder" means a neuro-developmental condition typically appearing in the first three years of life that significantly affects a person's ability to communicate, understand relationships and relate to others, and is frequently associated with unusual or stereotypic rituals or behaviours. (RPWD 2016)

3. Social Skills among Children with ASD

Social skills are the rules and disciplines one has to follow to interact people around and life in harmony. The social skills varies with family, regional, religion, gender and culture, people tend to pick up the social skills which suits them to live around people around them. In a way social skills are set of mutually agreed rules of various families living in a society.

Due to lack of social skills children with ASD often get trouble in interacting with others in socially appropriate manner. Due to deficit in working memory they are unable to generalize the social learning. They have limitation in language and communication skills which is an important tool for social interaction. They lack eye

contact. They have difficulty to keep up with conversation with others even for small duration talk. The lack of empathy. They have limitation in understanding the facial expression of others.

4. Benefits of Drama

Drama provides children with real life experiences through theatrical platform to express their feelings, thoughts, and solve problem of real life in a simulation manner. It helps children to explore their emotions and express them in an effective manner. Drama is custom made it address various issues like relationship, personal habits, good manners, moral values, etc. It helps children to build language and communication skills. It helps children to easily generalize the learned concepts. It is a cognitive behaviour therapy. It helps children to increase meta cognitive skills. It help them to manage depression, anxiety, and trauma.

5. Review of Literature

Fantuzoo et.al (2005) examined the unique relationship between multiple dimensions of classroom behavioural adjustment problems and silent social, emotional competencies for urban Head Start children. These relationship were investigated using a hierarchical model that controlled for the variance in social-emotional outcomes attributed to age, gender, and verbal ability. Classroom behavioural adjustment problems were assessed early in the year by the Adjustment Scales for Preschool Intervention (ASPI) across multiple, routine preschool classroom situations. Outcomes assessed at the end of the year included emotion regulation, peer play in the classroom and neighbourhood context, and approaches to learning. Socially negative behaviour in the classroom predicted emotional liability, maladaptive behaviours uniquely predicted lower affective engagement in the classroom and disconnections from peers in the home context.

Parshooram Rammooorthi(2008). Talking about the process of drama he said wearing masks, costumes , make up give a new identity. Entering into the character gives an opportunity to realise one's own inadequacy /shortcomings and also help the client to realise the multi-dimensional self. Material inside a client is revealed. Instead of getting stuck they get up, shout and scream about the problem.

According to Nelson & Ramamoorthi (2011), Drama constitutes plays very important role in introduction of new skills to children with ASD, it effectively helps them develop their artistic talents, social skills, communication and empathy.

Sherratt & Peter (2002) support that the creative potential of each individual can be developed through structured play. The intervention that takes place through play-drama aims at replacing the "triad of impairments" of the autistic spectrum with a "triad of competence". (Sherratt, & Peter, 2002: 14-15).

Rahimi Pordanjani (2021) Drama therapy will improve children's social skills and performance with an autism spectrum disorder. Therefore, this study's findings might be helpful as practical strategies for the practitioners in this field. Play and drama can enhance the social skills and encourage children with associated condition of Autism Spectrum Disorder. These results signify that additional study of drama therapy treatment is needed to make the evidence base for such interventions in this client group

Corbett et.al (2010)in his pilot project succeeded in evaluating this novel intervention by including neuropsychological, biological, and behavioural data. The results shows that potential promise of using a theatrical approach and setting, along with established behavioural science methods, to facilitate the development of core areas of challenge in youth with autism.

Korukcu, O., Ersan, C., & Neriman(2015) The Drama had a great impact in teaching social skills among students. Social skills educational programmes are crucial for undergraduate students in their activities of daily living that would help them to gain professionalism. This would help them in future. Drama teaches students the sense of empathy. It teaches the emotional expressions to be experienced by an individual. Students get to know others and also them to self discover their strengths and limitations.

Batdi & Elaldi (2020).the study result indicated that drama method have a positive impact on not only on social communication skills but also on other areas of development like cognitive, and affective domains, learning environments. In meta analytic phase, the results revealed a positive and significant level of drama on social communication skills with a large effect size. According to the results of descriptive analysis phase, drama was effective on not only making and executing a work with a group but also beginning and maintaining a relationship and gaining social skills of self - control. These quantitative findings were supported with the qualitative outcomes of the research. Although the findings of current research can only be generalized in the

context wherein the study was conducted, it can have important implication and insights on drama and its effect on social communication skills not only in Turkey but also in other countries.

Freeman, Sullivan, & Fulton (2003). The authors have examined the effects of creative drama activities on self-concept, problem behaviour, and social skills. A sample of 237 students from Grades 3 and 4 were selected randomly to participate in the study and assigned randomly to groups. A Solomon 4-group design was used. Students in the experimental group were given treatment by creative drama activities 1 day per week for 18 weeks. The Data is analyzed data using a 2×2 factorial analysis of variance. Significant treatment effects were not found for any of the dependent variables. Results result shows that gender factor has no role in learning. The main and interactive effects of pretesting were negligible. The specific variables to be measured and the potential for skewed distributions on pre test measures are factors to be considered in studies with creative drama as the treatment.

Besides literacy and numeracy, Janus and Offord (2000) identify social competence, communication skills, and general knowledge as some of the developmental skills that children should possess in order to be able to learn effectively in school.

Baranck et. al. (2005) investigated the ways in which the infants with autism or developmental delay differ in their object play behaviours, and data was analyzed in several ways. The study describes the methodological issues in using respective video analysis and computer-based coding as a research tool for early identification of autism. Home video of 32 children with autism (n=11), developmental delay (n=10) and typical development (n=11) were edited and analyzed for duration and highest level of object play in four hierarchical categories (exploratory, functional, symbolic) using the observer 3.0 .The three groups had similar levels of engagement with objects, and no statistically significant difference in duration of exploratory play. Higher levels of play were rarely evident at 9-12 months, however the highest level achieved (functional play) was apparent only in the typical group. The study demonstrates feasibility for using computer based coding technology in the context of retrospective video analysis methods. There is a difference in inter group as well as intra group. Between the group low autism children were the last responsive to the distress of others followed by M.R. high functioning autism, DLD & Normal. Within the group the female children were more responsive than the male children.

6. Methodology

Sample and Sampling Technique: Total 10 students were selected using purposive sampling technique
In order to select the participants for the study 42 children were subjected to certain inclusionary and exclusionary criteria and Tools and Techniques for Testing them are listed in the following table

Table No: 1 Criteria for the Selection of Participants and Tools and Techniques for Testing the Criteria.

S.No	Criteria	Source of information	Tool Used and Person administered	Number of Subjects Eliminated with Reason	Number of subjects retained
1	Consent by parents		Consent forms Developed by Investigator.	11 parents did not give the consent	31
2	Chronological Age range between 5- 7	Case Files	Date of Birth Certificate from case files.	10 children were below 5 years of age.	21
3	Children with ASD with Average or above average Intelligence	Case Files	DST Administered by Clinical psychologist at the clinic.	07 children were below average in intelligence and exhibited global developmental delay.	14
4	Children should not be associated with following additional disability like <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Hearing Impairment ➤ Cerebral palsy ➤ Visual impairment 	Case Files	(DST, Audiologist, Paediatrician, Ophthalmologist, Neurologist.)	04 children Sensory Impairment.	10

As revealed in the above table only 10 children with ASD fulfilled all the criteria stipulated in the study. Those 10 children were involved in the study.

Tool: The following self made tool is used to assess children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. A battery of School readiness programme developed by research has been used for assessment of social skills. An adapted form of the tool is as follows.

7. Design of the Experiment

A Single case pre-test post-test design was followed in the study (i.e. the clinical method). A clinical method is justified for the present study because a clinical method follows an initial assessment of the students learning, followed by a special type of teaching based upon these assessment. An assessment should involve the identification of learning strengths and weaknesses which impedes the smooth acquisition of social related skills. Specialized teaching or clinical teaching refers to the objectives of designing learning experiences appropriate to the individual needs of students. Based on the results of the assessment process and the identification of distinctive learning characteristics of students, the teacher, using a clinical approach formulates a special teaching program. Clinical teaching is an approach used in the general education classroom, in the resource room, and in individual therapy. This approach has been called as remediation. The same holds true for the present study also. Since the selected sample- children with ASD was heterogeneous in nature, getting control group for the same nature and same level was difficult. Hence a single case of pre-test post-test design was thought to be appropriate in the context of the present clinical study.

8. Data Collection

The intervention was based on the activities of Drama therapy by Dr. Parshooram Rammoorthy a mask man of India. The researcher is trained in use of Drama for teaching children with autism spectrum disorder. The intervention has started with warm up exercises physical exercises. The drama basic skills were taught to the students like eye movement, body movement, body awareness, identification of animals, sound of animals, vehicles and their sound, sound of the wind. Were taught to identify Emotions like smiling, laughing, crying, angry, sorrow etc. They were taught to express emotions when asked for eg they are asked to how do they laugh smile, cry etc. A set of creative stories were created which has involved daily livings activities of classroom and home. For example A creative story on Birthday celebration, washing hands, Sneezing, Picnic, Table manners, Play ground, Make up of others etc.

The Activities were group activities. All the parents and siblings were involved in drama activities so that they can make their children to practice the same with other family members at home. The parents were also asked to do all the activities of the therapy sessions. A total of 24 session were given -twice a week and for 12 weeks.

9. Result

Table 4: Comparison of Masters Vs Non-Masters of Social Skills on pre-test, post-test among CWASD and the performance of Typically Developing Children on Battery of School Readiness (BSR)

Table 4.28: Percentage of Masters Vs Non Masters in Social Skills among CWASD in Pre Test

S.No	% Range	% of Participant
	Below 20	90
2	20-40 %	10
3	40-60 %	0
4	60-80 %	0
5	80-100 %	0

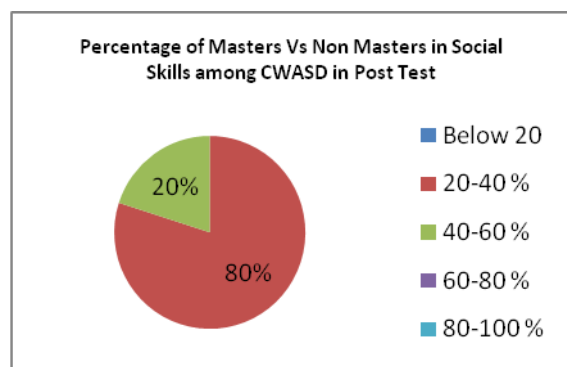
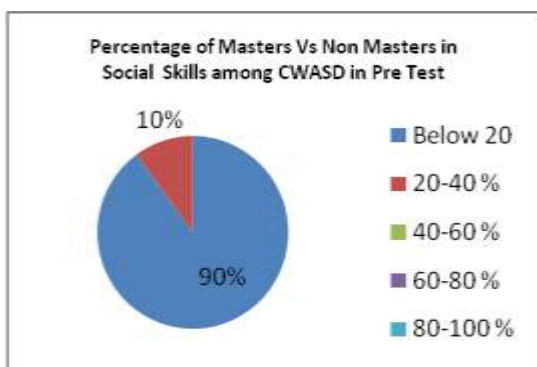
Table 4.29: Percentage of Masters Vs Non Masters in Social Skills among CWASD in Post Test

S.No	% Range	% of Participant
1	Below 20	90
2	20-40 %	10
3	40-60 %	0
4	60-80 %	0
5	80-100 %	0

Figure 1: Percentage of Masters Vs Non Masters in Social Skills among CWASD in Pre Test

Figure 2: Percentage of Masters Vs Non Masters in Social Skills among CWASD in Post Test

9.1.



In social skills, most of the children with ASD had non-mastery on pre-test. After intervention, 80% children with ASD had score between 20 to 40 percent. It was found that children with ASD have not achieved mastery in social skills. When compared with Typically Developing children (TDC) in this area, it can be presented that

in social areas participants with ASD require continuous practice to achieve mastery level. One of the main reasons for not achieving mastery level could be lack of continuous practice because these skills require continuous practice in home which is the natural environment to practice social skill.

Lack of Social skills is a basic nature of children with Autism spectrum disorder. Maybe only 24 sessions were given, that's why students have not achieve mastery level. However there is a significant improvement among children with autism spectrum disorder.

10. Discussion

The qualitative and quantitative results shows that the effectiveness of the intervention through drama in teaching social skills is positive. There is a improvement in social skills among children with autism spectrum disorder. Although the sample size was very small but the results were effective. In a critical study of ten researches that examined interventions in the social skills in children with Asperger Syndrome or High Functionality Autism only three researches contain a sample larger than ten participants (Rao, Beidel, & Murray, 2008). Kempe & Tissot support in one of their researches that in classes with fewer children, more chances are given for the development of social skills (Kempe, & Tissot, 2012)

It was seen that the mask had a great impact on improving the eye contact among children with ASD. "Children with Autism avoid eye contact to feel safe and the mask gives them that feeling of safety by avoiding direct eye contact" says Dr. Parasuram. In some performing arts like Kathakali, Yakshagana where artist paint their face with vibrant colours to transform their character likewise a child with autism goes through metamorphosis when they gets their face painted or wear a mask.

In one the activity where the children and parents has to paint the faces of each other where they have to look at the face of each other in order to paint. This activity helped them in improving the eye contact. After painting students were curiously looking at the faces of their mother for long duration and the frequency also increased. It indicates that as the child gets painted or paints others they get internalized the process and feels less inhibited. With the mask the peripheral vision is cut off and the child gazes through the hole which is less distracted. The magic of mask was such that it has increased their span of attention.

Roys (2020) findings says "the student mask usage had positive impacts on the students' reported self-awareness and perceptions. Students were engaged in their classrooms when using masks and offered perceptive self-reflections, not only of the learning potential of using masks in the classroom, but also of their sense of identity and their behaviors outside and beyond the classroom and school. Whilst there is evidence of positive impacts in what their teachers and students reported and what was observed in classrooms, this is insufficient to establish a causal relationship definitively between mask use and the self-development of students. It is necessary to undertake further research to replicate such findings".

The study of Guli, et al., (2013) effectiveness of an innovative Social Competence Intervention Program was explored, which is based on creative drama and addresses children with ASD, at the ages 8 to 14. The findings of the study shows that the participants exhibited considerable improvement in social skills and generally in their social functionality in relation to the control group.

Although there are many therapies from A to Z for children with autism spectrum disorder. the review of research indicated that Drama has a great impact on teaching social skills. Through the present study it was seen that the creative stories in the form of drama had impact on other areas of domain like academic, personal, language and cognitive skills. Reading et al (2016) also say that the theatre experiences described in this study resulted in significant gains in social and communication behaviours as measured by the Rating of social behaviour. The study provides further evidence that theatre experiences can be beneficial for students with ASD

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